

Letters

A proposal for rank insignias

I know there is a lot of history behind the Army rank structure. The emblems used to identify the enlisted ranks have evolved drastically throughout the years to accommodate the needs of the time. If you take into consideration the changes we made in 1958 with the adoption of the specialist nine insignia, you may agree that we have come a long way. But I think there are still a few more changes needed. Please bear with me on this and try to think out of the box.

I have never understood why, with the current rank structure, that privates do not have an insignia to represent their grade. I also fail to understand why we use an arc for the rank of private first class and then take it away for corporal and sergeant. I really do not think the specialist's eagle device should stand among all the other chevrons and arcs. It just does not make sense.

I believe that the enlisted ranks are subdivided into three groups and should be represented that way. In other words, soldier insignias from private through private first class should look similar and have one through three chevrons. Junior NCOs should all have arcs, one through three arcs respectively, and we should eliminate the specialist rank. Finally, all senior NCOs should all have a device in the center of the insignia. First sergeants and platoon sergeants would use the same distinguishing wreaths that differentiate command sergeants major and sergeants major. If the wreaths make the center device hard to distinguish, especially while in battle dress uniforms, then we can use something else. I think something like a bar behind the center device instead of the wreath would work. Under my concept, the Sergeant Major of the Army insignia remains unchanged.

Now, I know former servicemembers may not like the idea of a sergeant sporting the insignia of a sergeant first class, but it would be a transition that we would have to go through — and support — just as we did the transition to the beret. It may take a while to get used to, but I believe it would not be too difficult, because there is rhyme and reason with the NCO rank structure I propose. The increased amount of chevrons and arcs on most of the grades may also be a motivational factor for soldiers.

With this wholesale change of how our ranks look, it would probably be a good time to change the way we refer to NCOs. I have always found the term to be negative in nature. Calling us *noncommissioned* officers is like saying we have limitations, much like we refer to someone as a nonswimmer, a noncombatant or a non-whatever. What is wrong with "Sergeant?" Someone once said that an NCO is a leader and a sergeant only works for a paycheck. That is nonsense. I suppose I could go on and on with the term "NCO," but that would be another article.

I know that the ideas I have mentioned are controversial. There is a lot of history and sentiment behind what we currently have, but just because we have been doing something for a long time, doesn't mean it is the best way to do it. I say we improve these small things and get our rank structure dress-right-dress.

*Sgt. Maj. Osvaldo Vasquez
Fort Hood, Texas*

Thank you for inspiration

I want to thank Angela B. McGuire for the poem she submitted for the thoughts of her son Joshua toward his father's service for our country. I cut out the page the poem was on and framed it. The framed poem now sits on the dining room wall of my family's house for all who come to read and maybe understand what comes to our minds when we think of being an NCO in the Army today.

I say "we," because my wife is also a sergeant in the Army (some days I think she is a better sergeant than I). It is hard to imagine being sent away from my two girls, but even harder when I realized I might be the one who stays home instead.

Thank you Mrs. McGuire and thanks to all of you sergeant moms who fight and live that poem every day as well.

*Sgt. Adrian Swanson
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The value of sharing the *Journal*

I commend you on the improvements in this [January 2003] issue. I especially appreciate the brevity of the articles and the content quality. I am greatly pleased that you have set yourself the mission to continuously improve the *NCO Journal*.

I have always enjoyed the magazine and when I have extra copies I share them with a group of NCO retirees who now reside in Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama and Florida. Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Larry Kennedy is my point of contact for this group. He tells me how much the group members appreciate seeing the senior NCOs of today's Army and reading about their issues and challenges. Further, he tells me that he also gives the magazine to his local library where it is again enjoyed by other past and possibly future NCOs. So you can see the breadth and depth of influence that your *Journal* can provide by a simple act of sharing.

Keep up the good work.

*Sgt. Maj. of the Army (Ret.) William Wooldridge
1st Sergeant Major of the Army*